

[And say; My Lord! Increase me in knowledge.—Qur'ân]

ISLAMIC CULTURE

Vol. XVII, No. 3

July 1943

PUBLISHED UNDER THE AUTHORITY
OF H.E.H. THE NIZAM'S GOVERNMENT
HYDERABAD-DECCAN

MAKHDŪMA-I-JAHĀN : A GREAT RULER OF THE DECCAN

SYNOPSIS

[AGHA Nargis Bānū, who bore the title of Makhdūma-i-Jahān, was one of the greatest women who ever flourished in the Deccan. She was a queen of the Bahmanī dynasty whose achievement in politics and culture are remarkable. She was a great ruler and a successful administrator. She ruled the Bahmanī kingdom for 12 years, from 1461 to 1472 A.C. Though she never ascended the throne and never appeared in durbars as Sulṭāna Raḍia of Delhi did, yet, from behind the veil, as the regent of her minor sons, she steered the ship of state skilfully amid stormy seas. She assumed the helm at a time of emergency, when the kingdom was in immediate danger of disruption after the death of her husband Humāyūn. Internally it was seething with discontent, and externally it was threatened by powerful foes, who shook it to its very foundations. The queen rose to the occasion, and shouldered the entire responsibility of the government. As the head of the regency, she laid down the policy to be followed, guided her ministers, and met the foreign foes who poured in one after another, with the result that the kingdom remained intact as it was before. But she is one of the unfortunate personalities to whom history has done scant justice. Great as she was, she was overshadowed by the more glamorous personality of Maḥmūd Gāwān, though he was entirely her creature].

AS no contemporary document of Bahmanī history is extant it is not possible to sketch the early life of Āghā Nargis Bānū Makhdūma-ī-Jahān. It is certain that she was a direct descendant of the Bahmanī kings through her father. She was the grand-daughter of the great Bahmanī king Fīrūz Shāh Bahmanī, and the daughter of his second son Mubārak Khān.[1] Ḥasan Khān and Mubārak Khān were his two sons who are known to history, and they survived their father after he was ousted from the throne and died. They were fully grown up and married in the life-time of their father, and therefore it is quite probable that Āghā Nargis Bānū was born and brought up at Gulbarga in the reign of her grandfather and had seen its glories. It seems that the highly intellectual atmosphere of the reign of Fīrūz Shāh Bahmanī largely moulded the receptive mind of Nargis Bānū, who had inherited from her grand-father many noble qualities. Fīrūz Shāh's was a glorious reign which inspired many great men who came in contact with it, and doubtless Nargis Bānū had learned much and had imbibed the spirit of the age even in her childhood. When Fīrūz Shāh was ousted from the throne by his brother Aḥmad Shāh Walī in 1422 A.C., the whole situation changed and the descendants of the former king were in a sad plight. Fīrūz Shāh was sent into confinement and his descendants were banished to Fīrūzābād on the Bheema, to live a quiet life. Ḥasan Khān who had been nominated by his father

1. *Burhān-i-Ma'āthir*, Hyderabad edition, p. 96.

as his successor, was an open rival to Aḥmad Shāh and therefore he deserved the banishment. But his younger brother Mubārak Khān was also forced to retire to Fīrūzābād.[1] And thus it is quite probable that his famous daughter Āghā Nargis Bānū accompanied him and lived with him at Fīrūzābād in semi-confinement, missing the pleasant social and literary atmosphere which she enjoyed at Gulbarga. But it appears that the impressions of those early days never faded from her mind, but later became her guiding ideas and made her a great queen and ruler.

The later life of Āghā Nargis Bānū, when she was brought back from Fīrūzābād to Bīdar and married to Humāyūn, is equally obscure. It is not unreasonable to suppose that, being a princess of the royal blood, she was selected by 'Alā'uddīn II as a proper match for his son Humāyūn, and was then married to the prince. It may not be true to say that Āghā Nargis Bānū's conjugal relations with Humāyūn were very happy, but she was recognized as a distinguished member of the royal household and enjoyed the high position of a queen. She was honoured with the title of Makhdūma-i-Jahān, either by her father-in-law, 'Alā'uddīn II or by Humāyūn in his own reign. Though it was a common title which was usually conferred on all the Bahmanī queens, Āghā Nargis Bānū also proved herself worthy of the honour by her noble achievements, which still live in history. As she lived in the capital after her marriage, she also came into contact with the political activities of the times, and had a chance of studying the political and administrative progress of the reign of 'Alā'uddīn II, which added to her practical knowledge.

There is every reason to believe that Makhdūma-i-Jahān was a highly educated and cultured lady with a high degree of political consciousness and administrative capacity. Though actual instances of her active participation in politics are not known, yet it appears that she was, somehow or other, brought into contact with some sections of the state administration, either in the reign of her father-in-law 'Alā'uddīn II, or in the short reign of her husband Humāyūn. Her political insight, and administrative experience were already recognized by her royal husband and the nobles alike. Humāyūn was greatly impressed by her political ability, and trusted her to be a successful dowager queen of the Deccan, and it was for this reason that he, on his death-bed, placed the entire administration of the kingdom in her charge. He nominated his minor son Niẓām Shāh to be his successor, and appointed a council of regency to conduct the affairs of state with Makhdūma-i-Jahān at the head. To quote a later historian, "Makhdūma-i-Jahān was a wise, far-sighted and highly educated lady fully acquainted with the state administration."[2] Ferishta calls her a wise and shrewd lady,[3] and 'Alī-bin-Azīzullāh employs very high-sounding

1. *Burhān-i-Ma'āthir*, Hyderabad edition, p. 53.

2. *Maḥbūb al-Waṭān*, (محبوب الوطن) by 'Abdul-Jabbār Khān, p. 592.

3. Ferishta, Lucknow edition, pp. 343 and 347.

epithets in her praise such as " Queen of the World and the Mistress of the Universe."[1]

The council of regency which was appointed by Humāyūn before his death to conduct the state administration during the minority of his son, consisted of Khwāja Jahān, the Turk, and Khwāja Maḥmūd Gāwān, besides Makhdūma-i-Jahān. These two ministers, one an adventurer and the other a trader, who hailed from Transoxiana, were welcomed and ennobled in the reign of 'Alā'uddīn II. They were further promoted to the military command and governorship respectively in the succeeding reign of Humāyūn, who came into contact with them in course of time and recognized their merit. The king also, on his death-bed, selected them to serve on the council of regency in the capacity of ministers. But with a view to ensuring sound and firm administration, he vested the supreme authority in Makhdūma-i-Jahān and ordered the ministers to follow her directions,[2] because the ministers were foreigners and the king was not sure of their loyalty and efficiency. The queen had authority to lead the regency and lay down the lines of the policy which was carried out by the ministers. Although she never appeared in the council of regency or the durbar, she steered the ship of state from behind the veil with as much political skill and alacrity as the situation required. Her first act was to confirm Khwāja Jahān, the Turk, and Khwāja Maḥmūd Gāwān in the posts of foreign minister and premier in compliance with the dying wish of the late monarch, and to give them the necessary powers to carry on the administration.[3] The ministers approached the dowager queen through an inmate of the harem called Māh Bānū and sought her advice,[4] which guaranteed sure administrative guidance.

The regency council started its daily work with the usual routine of government, as it had been carried on in the previous reigns. The durbars were held as usual with the boy-king seated on the Turquoise Throne, and ministers, nobles, and priests standing to his right and left in accordance with their rank and position. The central and the provincial officers were promptly appointed and confirmed with necessary instructions to report on all urgent matters. But from the very beginning the regency was called upon to solve some more intricate problems, internal and external, which demanded a higher order of political judgment. Internally the kingdom was in a state of great discontent owing to the tyrannical rule of the late king. The people who had suffered various hardships and were in constant danger of losing life, property, or honour, were entirely estranged from the government. Many noble families had left the kingdom in despair, and those who were bold enough to remain were either in confinement or lived a most unhappy life, dislodged from their former

1. *Burhān-i-Ma'āthir*, Hyderabad edition, p. 96.
2. Ferishta, Lucknow edition, p. 343.
3. Ibid., p. 343.
4. Ibid., p. 343.

positions of honour. Some of the nobility who had escaped from the despotic regime had made their abode outside the kingdom and were engaged in plotting against it. It was a most trying situation for the regency to cope with, and it was by no means an easy task to restore the good old days of the former kings. The dowager queen applied herself first to the task of revoking the harsh decrees promulgated by the late king, to rehabilitating the finances and administration of the state, to releasing the innocent people who were in prison, and restoring the private property which had been unjustly confiscated.[1] She tried her best to conciliate the loyal men who had been alienated from the government and called them back to service. Mallo Khan Dekni, who had escaped to Raichur in the last reign, was called back to service on very generous terms.[2]

The foreign situation, which was extremely complicated by the hostile movements of the neighbouring powers, was no less perplexing than that at home. The dowager queen had not yet succeeded in disposing of the domestic problems through her cherished policy of conciliation, when she was forced to encounter foreign invasions launched by the kingdoms of Orissa and Malwa. The Bahmanī kingdom was surrounded on all sides by the kingdoms of Gujrat, Malwa, Orissa, and Bijianagar, which, with the exception of Gujrat, were never friendly to her. The untimely death of Humāyūn and the accession of the boy-king Niẓām Shāh, together with the disloyalty of the Bahmanī nobles, provided an irresistible temptation to the rulers of Orissa and Malwa to attack the Bahmanī kingdom and seize some of its rich provinces. The rāja of Orissa, who was supported by the powerful landlords of Telugu country, was first in the field. He entered the Bahmanī kingdom *via*. Rajmundry and laid waste all the villages and towns up to Kolas.[3] Makhdūma-i-Jahān was however equal to the situation. In full co-operation with Khwāja Jahān, the Turk, and Khwāja Maḥmūd Gāwān, she managed to collect from all parts of the kingdom,[4] a big force of cavalry forty thousand strong, and marshalled them to oppose the enemy with the king and the ministers at the head. The two armies met at a place twenty miles from Bīdar. The main army had not yet moved from its camp for the military operations, when an advance guard which consisted of not more than one hundred and sixty horses led by the soldier-priest, Shāh Muḥibullāh, surprised the enemy and put them to flight. The rāja was so completely routed that he was at last forced to sue for peace and pay a heavy indemnity.[5]

But the victory was followed by another invasion from Malwa. The king of Malwa Maḥmūd Khaljī, who was seeking an opportunity, marched

1. *Burhān-i-Ma'āthir*, p. 96.
2. Ibid., p. 100.
3. Ferishta, Lucknow edition, p. 343.
4. Feristha, p. 343.
5. Ibid., p. 344.

to the Deccan through Khandesh with a strong force of cavalry. The rāja of Orissa and the Andhra Chief also availed themselves of the opportunity to avenge their former reverses, which placed the Bahmanī kingdom in a very critical situation. But the queen and her ministers remained steadfast in the discharge of their duty and strained every nerve to ward off the danger. They first arranged for the Tilangana army of the kingdom to move northward and check the advance of the eastern forces and then they mobilized the armies of Daulatabad, Bijapur, and Bera, to meet the northern enemy. They met Maḥmūd Khaljī at the fort of Qandhar. The Bahmanī forces were drawn up with the boy-king and Sikandar Khān, his foster-brother, in the centre, Khwāja Jahān and Khwāja Maḥmūd Gāwān on the right, and Niẓām-ul-Mulk on the left wing. In the first stage, the battle was so skilfully conducted by the Bahmanī general that sure success was promised to the Deccan arms, but its later development proved unfavourable owing to lack of co-operation and mutual confidence. When the centre, which was led by the young king and a general, was surprised by Maḥmūd Khaljī, it was not promptly helped by Khwāja Jahān, and was consequently dispersed. The sudden disappearance of the king and his canopy from the battlefield discouraged the entire Deccan army and compelled it to retire to Bīdar. Khwāja Jahān, however, had the courage to remove the baggage and save it from falling into the enemy's hands.[1]

Makhdūma-i-Jahān was alarmed at this reverse, the most serious that the Bahmanī kingdom had ever suffered. She was also shocked to hear the painful news that Khān-i-Jahān was in league with the invader, who, elated with the victory and encouraged by the jealousies of the Bahmanī nobles, was marching upon Bīdar. But the brave lady stood unshaken and faced the crisis with a firm and resolute mind. Since the time was not opportune, she postponed disciplinary action against the persons who had lost the day by their treachery and negligence,[2] and applied herself immediately to urgent needs of defence and the task of saving the kingdom from further aggression. Her first step in this direction was to console the officers who had taken an active and faithful part in the battle and then to remove the central government, comprising the king, ministers, and herself, to Fīrūzābād,[3] where, secure from the danger of invasion, she could save the government from falling into the enemy's hands, and coolly think over the possible means of defence. The transfer of the government was a very shrewd act which bore fruit in the long run. Though the city of Bīdar was captured and plundered by the enemy after a siege of 17 days, yet the fort, defended by Mallo Khān, who was posted there by the queen, held out to the last. And at Fīrūzābād the queen was making earnest efforts to expel the enemy from the soil of the Bahmanī kingdom.

1. Ferishta, pp. 344 and 345.
2. Ibid., p. 345.
3. Ibid., p. 345 and *Burhān-i-Ma'āthir*, 100.

As the Bahmanī forces which had sustained a crushing defeat at Qandhar were in a disheartened condition and could not be relied upon for further military action, the queen was forced to seek help from outside. According to 'Alī bin 'Azīzullāh she wrote a letter to Maḥmūd Bā'ighra appealing to the traditional alliance between the kingdoms of Deccan and Gujrat, and asking for help against the northern enemy.[1] There was a prompt response to the letter owing partly to the old alliance and the personal charm of Makhdūma-i-Jahān and partly to the rivalry which then existed between Malwa and Gujrat. Maḥmūd Bā'ighra of Gujrat at once marched to the Deccan and placed a strong army of twenty thousand horse at the disposal of Maḥmūd Gāwān, who was sent by the queen to meet him via Beer. This joint action on the part of the armies of Gujrat and Deccan proved too strong for Maḥmūd Khaljī of Malwa, and he was after all forced to leave Bīdar, routed and pursued by the defenders. The difficult and dangerous country of Goudwana through which he passed added to his disasters. Next year in 1462 A.C., he appeared again in order to avenge his previous defeat, but timely help from Gujrat again brought about his discomfiture.[2]

The flight of Maḥmūd Khaljī from the Deccan put an end to the external dangers which had threatened the Bahmanī kingdom for two years continuously. The victory which was gained against Malwa was a clear proof of the moral and material strength of the Deccan and of the greatness of Makhdūma-i-Jahān, whose personality was an indispensable asset in the crisis. She played the part of saviour of the Deccan inasmuch as she saved the kingdom from the fear of foreign invasion, and obliterated the stain of dishonour on its reputation. It was her personal influence that collected the disintegrated forces of the country and brought the kingdom of Gujrat to her help in time of need, with the result that the time-honoured sovereignty of the Bahmanī kingdom was restored to its proper position. It can be said with certainty that if the kingdom had been left entirely in the charge of the ministers, Khwāja Jahān the Turk and Khwāja Maḥmūd Gāwān, and had not benefited by the royal patronage, it was likely to have been dismembered and annexed by Malwa and other neighbouring powers. In the first place, the ministers, besides being of doubtful loyalty, were foreigners, not acquainted with the intricacies of Deccan politics. And secondly they were not in a position to exercise their influence in inter-state relations, which are usually governed by royal prestige and charm. Their appeal was not likely to get the same response from a foreign prince as that of the great queen herself.

It seemed to be a re-birth of the Bahmanī kingdom when the central government was brought back from Fīrūzābād to Bīdar and all the damage done by the Malwa invaders to public and private property was

1. *Burhān-i-Ma'āthir*, Hyderabad edition, p. 100.

2. 'Alī bin 'Azīzullāh has copied the letters which were addressed to the ruler of Gujrat in acknowledgment of his kind services to the Bahmanī kingdom.—*Burhān-i-Ma'āthir*, pp. 102, 104, 105, 106.

repaired and the city restored to its former glory.[1] The restoration was attended by the general rejoicings of the people who were tired of foreign oppression, though it has lasted only for a few weeks. The rejoicings were, however, temporarily marred by the sudden death of the young king, whose marriage was being celebrated with great pomp. His younger brother, Muḥammad Shāh Lashkarī, who was only nine years old, was raised to the throne in 1463 A.C., without any disorder in the government. The new reign was very peaceful because the kingdom had now emerged as a full-fledged power from the internal and external troubles which had been harassing it for the last two years. It was well defended, and the administration, in which the mother-queen took a keen personal interest, was just and efficient ; she also ensured the future prosperity and solidarity of the kingdom by providing good education and training for her son and guidance and encouragement for her ministers. Muḥammad Shāh was educated and trained by a great scholar of the time, Ṣadr-i-Jahān Sūshtry, with the result that he acquired high proficiency in writing, science, and the arts, and, according to Ferishta, became the most highly qualified ruler of the Bahmanī dynasty next to Fīrūz Shāh.[2]

The next important problem before the queen was to place the kingdom on a firm and a solid basis by putting loyal officers in the key-positions and purging the state of those who were disloyal. The queen realised that Khwāja Jahān the Turk, who held a high position as prime minister, was showing signs of disloyalty. He had betrayed the Bahmanī cause in the battle of Qandhar, and after that he appeared to be engaged in arrogating to himself the supreme position in the state at the cost of the royal members and other ministers. He treated Khwāja Maḥmūd Gāwān as his rival, and sent him on official tours to distant provinces of the kingdom so that he might be kept out of the way. The queen fully realised how urgent a problem it was to get rid of the minister before it was too late and his insubordination blossomed out into open rebellion. As it was not easy to deprive the minister of his power in a peaceful manner, the queen ultimately had to resort to physical force, and commissioned Niẓām-ul-Mulk, a military officer, to put him to death. One day, when Khwāja Jahān was coming to the palace, he was attacked and murdered by Niẓām-ul-Mulk. Violent though the act was, it was very necessary for the future peace and prosperity of the kingdom, otherwise there would have been civil war and great bloodshed in the long run. Khwāja Maḥmūd Gāwān, who had held the post of foreign minister so far, was promoted to the vacant office and was honoured with a long list of high-sounding titles[3] such as were hitherto unknown in the history of the Deccan and India. This eminent position he owed entirely to Makhdūma-i-Jahān's royal patronage. It was she who trained him for the part that he played

1. Ferishta, Lucknow edition, p. 347.
2. Ibid., p. 347.
3. Ibid., p. 347.

in Deccan politics, and encouraged and promoted him to the highest position in the state, so that ultimately he became a renowned figure in history. On one occasion, when Khwāja returned victorious from Goa, she called him her brother[1]—a unique honour in the history of the Deccan, and one not enjoyed even by the great Bahmanī minister, Saifuddīn Gorī.

This change of personnel was followed by the installation of Muḥammad Shāh Lashkarī, who was now fourteen and capable of assuming the responsibilities of kingship. He was married and entrusted with the ruling powers in 1468 A.C., and he ruled very successfully in co-operation with Khwāja Maḥmūd Gāwān.[2] Though the queen henceforward lived a retired life, devoted to religious practices, she never ceased to guide and inspire the state administration with her personal charm and political insight. She sometimes accompanied military expeditions in order to encourage the soldiers and generals, and it is a memorable fact that she died, not at home, but in a military camp. Muḥammad Shāh too paid his respects to his mother every morning as a duty, and sought her counsel in the administration and especially in the higher problems of state, with the result that the kingdom was strong enough to defend itself and extend its territories to Goa on the west and Orissa and Masulipatam on the east.

The great queen who, according to Ferishta, "was solely responsible for the sound and progressive administration of the kingdom"[3] (کاروبار شاهی ازو رونق و نظام داشت), breathed her last in 1472 A.C., at Belgaum, when she was at the height of her brilliant career.[4] She had accompanied a military expedition to Belgaum and died there. Her remains were respectfully sent to Bīdar, and interned in the graveyard of her ancestors. The following poetic lines in Arabic, composed in her memory after her death, convey an idea of her worth and grandeur.

She was like a pearl of the crown, the Mary of all the ages.
When she received the call of her Creator,
Unseen voices shouted out the chronogram in her memory,
May God give help to the kingdom of her successor.

درة التاج مريم الاعصار　　اذا جاءت نداء باعثها
ملهم الغيب قال فى التاريخ　　ايد الله ملك وارثها[5]

'ABDUL-MAJĪD ṢIDDĪQĪ.

1. Ferishta, p. 350.
2. Ibid., p. 348.
3. Ibid., p. 348.
4. Ibid., p. 353.
5. *Maḥbūb al-Waṭān* by 'Abdul-Jabbār Khān, p. 492.